

century?) and Austen's chronology (why did slavery expand so long after the end of the eighteenth century?) shows that right down through the close of the Atlantic trade, frontiers of slavery were continually opening up beyond the writ of abolitionism.

For specialists in social history, it also remains unclear why industrializing Britain was so much more abolitionist in the 1780s than, say, industrializing France in the 1840s. Even for the English-speaking world, Engerman, despite his enthusiasm for an industrialization-cum-abolition model, seems to harbour misgivings about the historiographical implications of the Walvin/Anstey descriptions of working-class abolitionists. Might they not, he asks, have better concentrated their efforts on improving their own position in England? Significantly, this question is directed only toward the English *working* class. More attention might be directed toward groups as defined by religion, political culture and history than by occupational status. We do get hints of the importance of disparate cultural traditions. The emphasis on nationalist, religious and popular abolitionism in Temperley, Anstey and Walvin can be contrasted with the initial hostility of Daget's French sailors or the indifference of Austen's Indian merchants. Above all, the global perspective in this volume prevents us from falling into the pitfall of a Whiggish "modernization" theory and of assuming that all factors of social development converged to produce abolition. Austen, most notably, treats abolitionism as an exogenous force in the Afro-Asian area, not embedded in its economic or ideological structures. He expands the paradox with which Temperley begins, demonstrating the functional value of such collections.

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LEE SOLTOW and EDWARD STEVENS. — *The Rise of Literacy and the Common School in the United States: A Socioeconomic Analysis to 1870*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981. Pp. 247.

The authors of this volume present an impressive amount of statistical material relating to literacy and illiteracy in the United States from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth century. Much of this material is interesting and potentially instructive for those interested in questions of literacy or in more general questions concerning the development and character of common schooling.

Using census data and the assumption that the ability to sign one's name is a reliable indicator of literacy, Soltow and Stevens point to a general increase in levels of literacy in the United States over the period of study. On the average, perhaps sixty percent of adult males were literate in 1790 and perhaps eighty percent by 1870. Soltow and Stevens present a host of tables and graphs illustrating the development of factors (possibly) related to the development of literacy: the growth of printing and of the press, the spread of book ownership among different income groups, rates of school attendance and the distribution of the student population within a common school curriculum, and others. All of this quantitative material is potentially interesting to the student of literacy and common schooling in the nineteenth century.

Unfortunately, however, this book is a prime example of what C. Wright Mills described as "abstract empiricism". The authors assemble an enormous amount of empirical evidence which seems to be related to the development of literacy, yet this material is neither located in nor organized by any coherent theoretical framework. The book has no clear theme and the authors tell us little about the social processes involved in the development of literacy that is not crude, commonplace or chimerical.

While eschewing at the outset any attempt to present a "simplistic causal model" and while arguing that an analysis of literacy must emphasize "the reciprocal causal relations between literacy and social and economic institutions" (p. 1), Soltow and Stevens reduce social and economic institutions to socio-economic "factors" and argue that literacy is caused primarily by population density. Because literacy rates are higher in urban than in rural areas, the authors conclude that population density is a "primary causative factor in literacy rates" (p. 22). Granted, they note, there are intervening variables between population density and literacy — churches, schools and newspapers exist in greater concentration where population is dense(!) — but population density is the main cause. At best, this amounts to saying that literacy is highest where the institutions which promote literacy are most common. At worst, it is a crude reduction. In neither case are the social processes of literacy examined.

In a case study of the development of literacy in Ohio, the authors point to the importance of the development of an ideology of literacy in the middle of the nineteenth century. The generalization of an ideology which valued literacy was a key factor in the development of the common school. The reader is invited to believe that literacy was something promoted by newspaper editors and the authors of schoolbooks and that these social actors were key in the development of literacy. The activities of capitalists, philanthropists, trade unions, abolitionists, utopian socialists and any number of other groups are ignored.

Finally, in sharp contrast to the classic investigations of the development of literacy (such as Altick's *The English Common Reader*, Halévy's *Histoire du socialisme européen* or Simon's *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure*), the political context of the development of literacy is more or less completely neglected by Soltow and Stevens. The classic literature on the subject locates the issue of literacy as a political issue, firmly embedded in relations among classes and often itself a leading issue in those relations — as the English Six Acts and the development of monitorial schooling indicate. For Soltow and Stevens, the social world is composed not of social classes nor even of social groups in a strictly empirical sense, but rather of "literate" and "illiterate". It is not at all clear that these are homogenous or historically specific categories. By breaking the structure of social relations down into a few statistically manipulable "factors" these authors lose the possibility of coming to grips with the political-economic context of literacy.

Some books are better written as a number of limited empirical research articles. This is one.

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